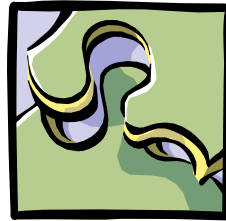


Training Module #6:



Striving for the I.D.E.A.L. in Decision Making

Introduction

This print module was produced by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl) specifically for Michigan Court Support Personnel.

The intent of this print module is to assist court staff to:

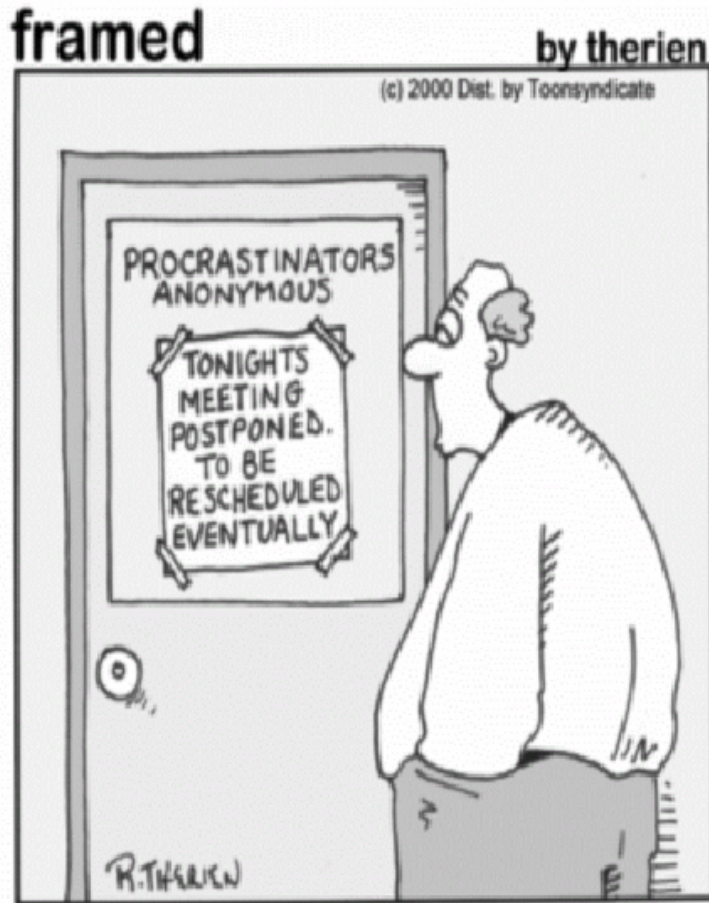
- ❖ **Determine when a problem is a problem**
- ❖ **Identify when they have decision making power**
- ❖ **Become familiar with and use a decision making process called I.D.E.A.L.**

The information is presented in a quick-read format and is intended to serve as a tool for learning, reflection, and dialogue.

For inquiries on this or other available Michigan Judicial Institute training resources, contact MJl at (517) 373–7171.

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Effective Decision Making



Each day we make decisions. Most decisions are in response to a problem that confronts us, such as “What should I wear?” or “What sounds good for dinner?” Other decisions can be more complex such as “Should I buy a used car or a new car?”

While some people address the issue head on, others may choose to do one of three things when faced with a complex or difficult decision:

1. They become uncomfortable or afraid to address the problem so they procrastinate.
2. They look to pass the problem off to someone else.
3. They address the problem and perhaps make a rash decision based on incomplete information.

Most people tend to look at problems as something that needs to be resolved and more often than not, they are not sure how to find the solution. Many of us have a tendency to avoid conflict and, as you have probably experienced, problem solving can very easily put us in the throes of conflict - internal conflict or conflict with those around us.

The goal of an effective decision making process, then, is to assist you in becoming more “conflict competent” and thus to make wise and effective decisions in response to any problem that may arise.

Permission to print granted by Ron Therien
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Based on: “Seven Steps for Effective Problem Solving in the Workplace” by Tim Hicks / www.mediate.com/workplace/thicks.cfm

Skills for Effective Decision Making

Circle those attributes that you believe contribute to effective decision making.

Need to be right

fear of the unfamiliar

persistence

controlling impulses

curiosity

Originality

coming to fast conclusions

Questioning

PRETENDING TO KNOW IT ALL

Anxiety

Wasting time on discovery

Seeking evidence

Right vs wrong

Flexibility

Objectivity

respect for other viewpoints

Rapid assumptions

Recognizing fact vs opinion

Open-mindedness

Need to support personal beliefs

objectivity

applying past knowledge

Thinking in generalities

Selective exploration

Ability to see patterns

Intellectual skepticism

System -wide approach

BASED ON: "Workplace Effectiveness" CD-ROM by the Alliance, www.employeegrowth.com

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Decision

INSTRUCTIONS: Assume you have ten points to allocate between each of the statements below ($1A + 1B = 10$, $2A + 2B = 10$, etc.). Allocate the points according to how closely each statement describes your feelings (the higher the number, the better it describes your feelings). **Answers on slide 6.**

Question #1.

- ☐ A. It is better to wait until you get all the information than to make a decision based on incomplete information.
- ☐ B. A delay in decision making is often worse than making an inaccurate decision.

Question #2

- ☐ A. It is important to make an accurate decision because mistakes really hurt you.
- ☐ B. Because I am human, I may make mistakes at times but I still stand by my decision as what seemed best at the time.

Question #3

- ☐ A. With most of my decisions I just try to make the best of the lesser of two evils.
- ☐ B. When making decisions, I have a plan or an objective that I want my final decision to accomplish.

Question #4

- ☐ A. If I am thorough enough, I will usually get all of the information before I make a decision.
- ☐ B. Regardless of how thorough I am, I rarely get all of the information before I make a decision.

Question #5

- ☐ A. I am careful not to put my decisions on record, because some decisions might cause problems for me.
- ☐ B. Even though some people may want to point fingers for mistakes, I willingly put my decision on record.

Question #6

- ☐ A. Ideally, I would like my entire department to have an equal voice in decisions concerning them.
- ☐ B. While I want my co-workers to have input, I also realize that more input slows down the process.

Decision

According to a survey by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and the American Association of Counseling and Development (AACD), the top skills employers are looking for in today's workplace are:

1. learning to learn
2. basic academic skills
3. good communication skills
- 4. creative thinking and decision making**
5. self-esteem, motivation, and goal setting
6. personal and career development skills
7. interpersonal/negotiation skills and teamwork; and
8. organizational effectiveness and leadership.

Creative thinking and decision making skills are highly valued in today's workplace. The challenge is to know when you have the authority to make the decision.

It has been said that a decision **should** be made at a level closest to the action as possible. However, a decision **must always be made** at a level where the results of the decision can be implemented. What does this mean? If you have it within your power to authorize and carry out the action called for by your decision, then you have the right to make the decision. If the action calls for a determination by your supervisor, then the decision needs to be made by your supervisor. Inform your supervisor of the problem and recommend a possible plan of action as well. Your supervisor will appreciate your contribution to resolving the issue IF you present your idea in the form of a suggestion or recommendation.

ANSWERS TO PAGE 6: The "A" answers lean toward indecisiveness. Add up all the points that you allocated to the "A" responses. If your score is: 80 points or higher, you are very indecisive; 60-79 points, you are somewhat indecisive; 40-59 points, you are bordering on indecisiveness; less than 40 points, you are an active decision maker.

When Is a Problem a Problem?

There are two important things to remember regarding this issue:

- ❖ FIRST, problems happen all the time—that is the nature of day-to-day life.
- ❖ SECOND, this day-to-day occurrence offers us the opportunity to turn problems into possibilities. Each problem that we are confronted with provides us with an opportunity to demonstrate who and what we are. Do we show ourselves as panicked, flustered, or angry when confronted with a problem, or do we respond with a calm and thoughtful attitude focused on a solution? Each occurrence provides us with another opportunity to reveal who we are or who we would like to be.

So, when does a problem become a problem? The answer - when it becomes YOUR problem—when the issue impacts you or reflects poorly on the organization you represent. That is the point at which you take on the role of decision-maker.

- ❖ What is the problem?
- ❖ How is the problem impacting my work and those around me?
- ❖ What do I do about this?

This is the point at which you step into the **I.D.E.A.L.** process.



**“The perception
of a problem is relative.
A headache
is a pain to you
but feels terrific
to the druggist.”**

Ramona E. F. Arnett
(1884–1966)
Cosmetics Executive

The I.D.E.A.L. Process

For Problem Solving and Decision Making

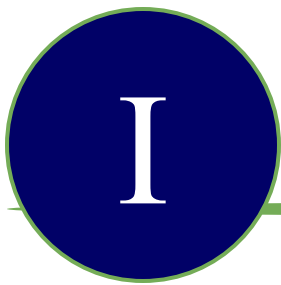
People are born problem solvers so the biggest challenge to overcome is the tendency is to rush to a decision. The most common mistake in problem solving is trying to find a “quick fix” solution. Effective problem solving and decision making take time and attention - but less time and attention than required by a problem not well solved. On the other hand, delaying a decision beyond a given point can lead to ineffectiveness as well. The challenge is to first identify a timeline in which the decision needs to be made.

You see, a problem is like a curve in the road. Approaching the curve competently will prepare you for the straight-away that follows. Approaching the curve too quickly and without forethought may cause you to swerve into a “ditch”, and approaching too slowly can cause you to lose your momentum.

The following pages will introduce you to a process for problem solving and decision making that can be used by one person trying to resolve a problem or by a group that shares the same problem. The more difficult and important the problem, the more helpful and necessary it is to use a disciplined approach to resolving that problem.

Based on: *“Seven Steps for Effective Problem Solving in the Workplace”* by Tim Hicks / www.mediate.com/workplace/thicks.cfm





Identify the Problem

Be clear about what the problem is. The first task of the process is to clearly identify the problem as well as its cause. How is the problem impacting you and those around you? Is there something else happening that may also be contributing to the problem?

ACTIVITY

Identify a problem you are now experiencing.

Use the space to the right and jot down your thoughts related to this problem.

PROBLEM:

What is causing the problem and why?

How does the problem impact you?

How does the problem impact others?

Other contributing factors to the problem?

Your space to write.



Define the Impact

Now think about the individuals who are part of the problem or who are impacted by the problem.

- ❖ What are the needs you want satisfied by a solution?
- ❖ Who else will be impacted by the solution? What are their needs? What are their concerns, anxieties or difficulties?
- ❖ If time allows, gather more information. Talk with others who will be impacted BEFORE a decision is made. Remember: the best decision is one that satisfies everyone's interests.

Use the next page to identify those who are impacted by the problem and those who should be consulted in the decision process.

Mapping for Decision Making/Problem Solving

Problem: _____

Who: _____

Needs: _____

Concerns: _____

Who: _____

Needs: _____

Concerns: _____

Who: _____

Needs: _____

Concerns: _____

Who: _____

Needs: _____

Concerns: _____

BASED ON: "Conflict Resolution Kit" by the Conflict Resolution Network, Chatswood, Australia, www.crnhq.org



Explore Possible Solutions

GENERATING TOOLS:

When identifying solutions think about:

- ❖ Obvious Solution—one to which we all would say “yes”
- ❖ Brainstorming—no censoring, all ideas welcomed
- ❖ Consensus—identify a solution together
- ❖ Lateral Thinking—have we been practical, creative?

CLARIFYING TOOLS:

If you are having difficulties identifying solutions, you may want to:

- ❖ Chunk—break the problem into smaller parts
- ❖ Research—find out more information
- ❖ Goal Set—what is it that I/we want?

SOLUTION #1

SOLUTION #2

SOLUTION #3

Your space to write.



Assess the Options

What are the challenges and opportunities created by each solution? *Be honest!*

- ❖ Is there already a policy in place to address this problem? (Check your employee manual.)
- ❖ Is this something you need to run by your supervisor in the way of a suggestion or recommendation?
- ❖ Is the solution good for all involved?
- ❖ Does it meet the needs of all parties?
- ❖ Is it fair to all involved?
- ❖ Are you opening a “can of worms” here? By resolving this issue / problem, are you setting a precedent that may not be what you want?
- ❖ Who besides you, needs to approve the decision or solution? Will that happen?
- ❖ How difficult will the solution be to implement?
- ❖ What ripples will the decision or solution cause in the organization? (*Be careful! You may be undermining yourself or others in the long run.*)
- ❖ What are the risks? What do you (or others) have to “lose” if you use this solution?
- ❖ If challenged are you willing to stand by your decision?

Based on the information above, make a decision as to what is the “best” solution or combination of solutions to your problem?

SOLUTION #1	Challenges	Opportunities
SOLUTION #2	Challenges	Opportunities
SOLUTION #3	Challenges	Opportunities

Your space to write.



Launch the Plan into Action

Now that you have identified a solution based on the information as best you know it at this place in time and you are willing to stand by this solution, it is time to lay out the groundwork for what needs to be done.

Identify the steps needed to launch the plan (**identified solution**) into action.

(Let your supervisor know of your action. Doing so will keep your supervisor informed should any concerns be voiced.)

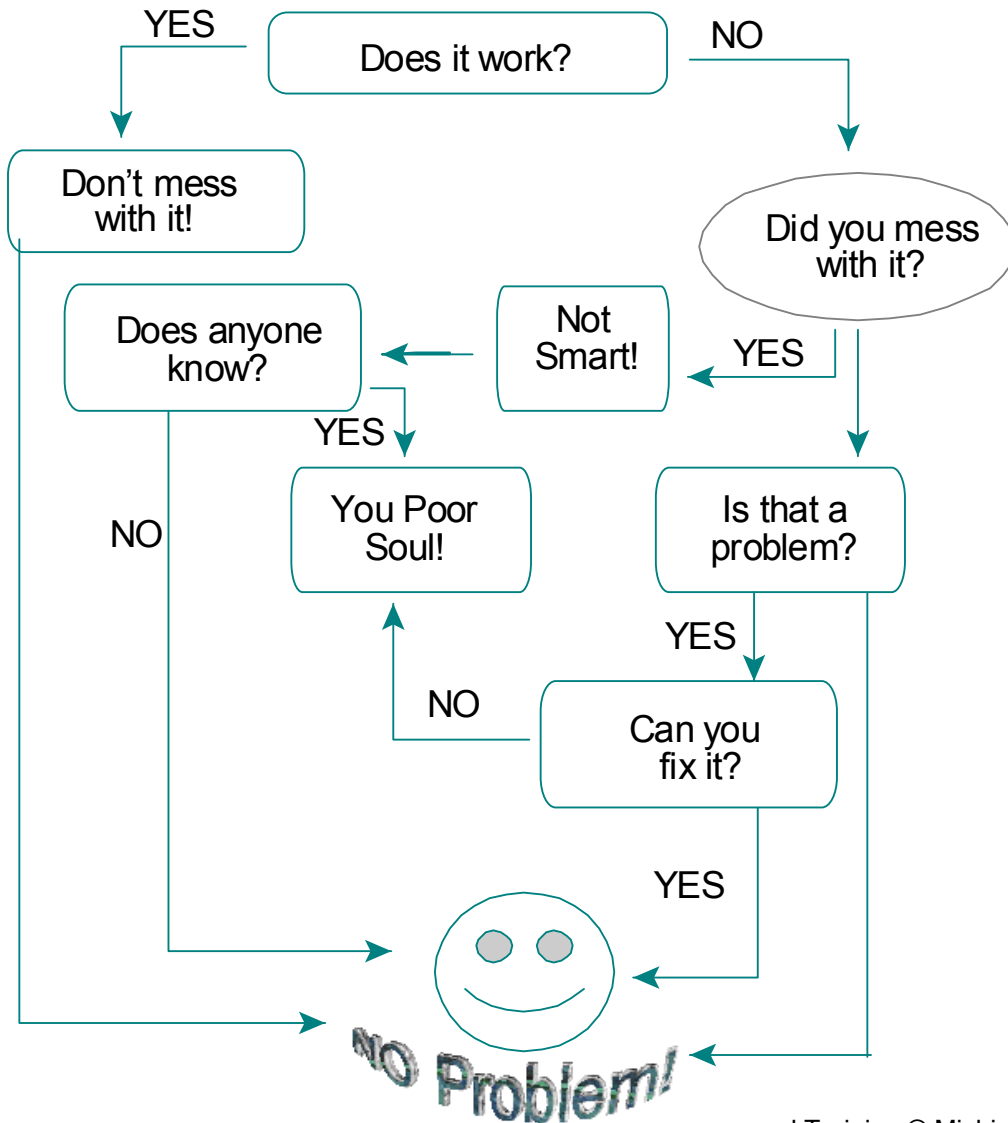
10 Tips for Effective Decision Making

1. **Use your time for problems that are truly important.** Just because a problem is there doesn't mean that you have to solve it. If you ask, "What will happen if I don't solve this problem?" and the answer is "Not much," then turn your attention to something more important.
2. **Do not make decisions that are not yours to make.**
3. **Test your assumptions about everything.** Check the facts first. Be sure that you understand the problem and that you have valid information to confirm that the problem is important - not just hearsay.
4. **Spend time looking for a solution rather than finger pointing.** Helping with a solution will be much more rewarding than wasting time trying to pin the blame on someone.
5. **Avoid "bug mentality."** Fixing bugs fixes symptoms; like taking aspirin for a headache. It may provide relief but does nothing to prevent the next headache. It's okay, and often necessary to relieve the symptoms, but you have to dig deeper if you're going to prevent problems from recurring.
6. **Choose solutions that are effective.** Double check and make sure your solution really will eliminate the causes you've identified.
7. **Choose a decision based on what is right not WHO is right.**
8. **Choosing the right alternative at the wrong time is not any better than the wrong alternative at the right time so make the decision while you still have time.**
9. **Recognize that you can never know with 100% certainty that your decision is correct.** You are making the decision on the best information and understanding you have at this point in time.
10. **Once you have made the decision and have started down the road, put the "what if's" aside.** It was the right thing for you to do at the time.

BASED ON: "Decision Making Tips" by Liraz Publishing Co., www.liraz.com/tdecision.htm

AND "20 Problem Solving Success Tips" by Jeanne Sawyer, the Sawyer Partnership, www.sawyerPartnership.com

Decision Making Flow Chart for Indecisive People



I.D.E.A.L.

1. Identify The Problem
2. Define The Impact
3. Explore Possible Solutions
4. Assess The Options and Make A Choice
5. Launch The Plan Into Action

Remember, the more difficult and important the decision, the more helpful and necessary it is to use a disciplined approach. While it might feel a bit unfamiliar and challenging at first, with use you will find the process gets easier.